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ILLEGIB



TRANG THIEM KIM
... "little Vietnamese girl"

Letter Writer Of Saigon Friend of U.S.

Girl Who Asked Critical Questions Is Identified

The "little Vietnamese girl" whose critical questions about America were published in The Washington Post on Feb. 25 is an 18-year-old budding actress in Saigon. Sources in the United States Embassy there characterize her as non-Communist and markedly pro-American.

These and other details about the teen-ager have been made available from official and private inquiries undertaken before and after publication of her letter. She wrote it, she has told those who have asked her, in a sincere effort to obtain answers to questions about United States activities in her country put to her by her Vietnamese friends.

Popular among many American acquaintances in Saigon, the girl to whom this newspaper gave the pseudonym "Miss Le-My" is named Trang Thiem Kim. She is described as one of the half-dozen most promising starlets in Viet-Nam's embryonic motion picture industry.

Her father, a retired employee of the Viet-Nam Government, has stated that his

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Saigon Letter Writer Identified as Actress

daughter wrote the letter without outside assistance or advice. Miss Trang's said to speak fairly good English but it was indicated she must have used a dictionary to produce her missive.

Its assertive tone and blunt questions provoked controversy in Washington when the letter was published. Some groups of readers, particularly those in the Vietnamese Embassy, expressed the belief that it was Communist-inspired. Others, conceding that many of the questions reflected heavy doses of Communist propaganda, took the letter to be sincerely motivated although obviously reflecting the anti-American line circulated by the Reds in Asia.

Miss Trang's father, Trang Van Quy, feels that his daughter "expressed herself too strongly," although he said he agreed with her basic points. There are also indications that Miss Trang herself misstated, through faulty English, her thoughts in two key questions.

Talked With American

The genesis of the letter was a conversation earlier this year between Miss Trang and an American Government employee passing through Saigon. She flooded him with questions but declined to accept his answers as sincere. The American, who formerly lived in Washington, urged her to put the same questions to this newspaper, feeling she might then believe the answer that would be forthcoming.

He promptly wrote The Washington Post, detailing the episode, and setting down the gist of Miss Trang's doubts and inquiries. After a lapse of some weeks, her letter arrived, addressed to Managing Editor Alfred Friendly. The questions were in most important respects those which the American forecast she would write.

Miss Trang has subsequently told American Embassy attaches in Saigon that she had no idea the letter would be published; there was nothing in her letter indicating a contrary wish. The decision to print the communication and to withhold her name temporarily was this newspaper's.

Miss Trang's American acquaintance, who has asked that his identity not be disclosed, subsequently wrote

The Washington Post his opinion that in two of her written questions, she phrased matters more harshly than she had in his conversation with her. He attributes this to her difficulty with the language.

• As one question, she wrote: "Do American people know that Ngo-Dinh-Diem [the Vietnamese President] is an American puppet as some of the Vietnamese think?"

Her American acquaintance believe she intended to say, "Do the American people know that some Vietnamese think that Ngo-Dinh-Diem is an American puppet?"

• In another question, Miss Trang wrote, "Do American people know that 95 per cent Vietnamese people don't like them?"

The former Washington man has told this newspaper: "As her question was put to me, it was, 'Do the American people know that 95 per cent of the Vietnamese don't like having so many Americans in their country?'"

"I questioned her about the 95 per cent and got the impression that she used that as a general term to mean 'the majority' or 'many'."

"She is no Communist. Her family are devout Buddhists, and her father is a loyal Government employee."

"She has a sharp mind, and that is the reason she is so keenly aware of the politics swirling around her, and not because she is a Communist."

"I'm afraid it's sad but true, that throughout Asia, and I guess throughout the world, it's usually the Communist young people who are most active and vocal about politics, and so other young people like Miss Trang are often suspect simply because they are also interested."

More than 225 readers acted on The Washington Post's suggestion that they write their own replies to "Miss Le-My." Only two of these are vituperative and contend that American aid should be cut off in view of her "ingratitude." The others, almost without exception, give earnest and well-wishing explanations of American aims and attitudes. The letters are being forwarded to her.

Judging from the responses, interest in Miss Trang's letter was particularly high among school children, college students, housewives and foreign visitors and students.